

New Hope for Urban Schools

By Terry Ryan

Contrary to many people's glum assumption, urban school systems are not all education disaster zones. Nor are they all alike. Some, in fact, are far more effective than others at educating children—and we're beginning to understand why that is and what might enable other urban school systems to turn themselves around. A smashing new study recently released by the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) provides a major boost to that understanding. At a time when the U.S. is seeking to "leave no child behind," the study is very welcome indeed.

We've known for ages that good schools occasionally flourish within even the most decrepit school systems. The "effective schools" research of the 1970s and 1980s contributed much to that knowledge. It helped us describe the usual characteristics of effective schools. It helped us to spot them hither and yon. The great frustration was that nobody knew quite how to replicate them. They were more like wild flowers, turning up on their own, than a crop to be cultivated.

We've also known for some time that, while many efforts at systemic urban school reform get nowhere—see Frederick Hess's *Spinning Wheels* for one perceptive analysis—others lead to real change and measurable gains. (See Don McAdams's *Fighting to Save Our Urban Schools and Winning!* for an account of Houston's successful effort to

turn itself around.) However, like the "effective schools" research, those explanations have been situation-specific and hard to generalize.

CGCS set out to find more easily generalized, and replicable, explanations for why some urban systems make greater progress than others. Assisted by the Manpower Development Research Corporation with funding from the Ford Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education, CGCS sought districts that, in executive director Mike Casserly's words, "had improved in both reading and math in over half of their grades, had done so at rates faster than their respective states, and had simultaneously narrowed their racially identifiable achievement gaps."

They settled on four such systems—Charlotte-Mecklenberg, Houston, Sacramento and the "Chancellor's District" within New York City—and studied them to determine "what districts can do to boost performance citywide rather than waiting for the turn-around of individual schools." They also examined some (unnamed) comparison districts of similar size and demographics.

What distinguished the higher-performing school systems? The analysts identified a half-dozen "preconditions for reform," and nine "strategies for success," and stressed that all of these things must happen together. This is no menu from which to pick and choose one or two favorite or politically convenient items.

The preconditions for reform turn out to be these:

- A new school board not attached to the status quo that pursues reform with a singular focus on raising student achievement.
- A shared vision of reform—and a superintendent willing to be held accountable for results.

- An ability to identify instructional problems that could be solved systemwide.
- The capacity to sell the school system's reform vision to the larger community.
- A central office imbued with a sense of customer service and able to operate effectively and scandal-free.
- A willingness to use new funds to improve instruction rather than for other

programs, across-the-board raises, etc.

With those conditions in place, the higher-performing school systems deployed these strategies:

- Develop instructional cohesion by aligning the system's curriculum with state standards.
- Create accountability systems that exceed state requirements and hold district personnel and school-level leaders personally responsible for producing results.
- Focus attention on the lowest performing schools.
- Centralize and standardize curricula and instruction across the system, especially

in reading and math.

- Centralize professional development and focus it on helping teachers meet state standards.
- Drive reforms into the classroom by concentrating on building-level implementation and classroom-level instructional improvement.
- Base decisions on data, not hopes or hunches. Use data to analyze problems, monitor progress, and refine strategies.
- Target initial reforms at the elementary level to stop the flow of students into higher grades who lack basic skills.
- Provide struggling middle and high school students with intensive instruction in basic reading and math.

★★★★★
 Teachers, principals, and school administrators were also given the opportunity to celebrate successes along the way—and those who were not committed to seeing the mission through were asked to leave.



Continued on page 7,
 See... "New Hope for Urban Schools"



Talking Letters

Dear AAE,

I hope this message is on topic and will be of interest to the other subscribers and may be included in your newsletter.

My mother has been teaching preschool and kindergarten for about twenty years with her partner at their school on Signal Mountain, Tennessee. They have used the same phonics program for that time. They also used it as they taught at a previous school before starting their own. Now that they are retiring, they did not want their phonics program to go with them. They have had great success with it. The phonics program is called Talking Letters. They have just put the program on video, cards, workbook, and poster.

The program mainly revolves around teaching the children to associate the sound of a letter to its shape, without actually learning the letters "real name." Each of the letters has a story name. For instance, the letter "t" is called little man. His father gave him a watch which he holds to his ear and it goes t-t-t. On the card the letter "t" is on one side with little man superimposed in the shape, and on the reverse side is the story and some suggested words. The stories are often embellished to make the story more fun. All the letters know each other and the stories are intermingled and related. "o" is donut boy, when he comes out of the hot oil he says, "o-o-o" (as in otter or olive). All the stories are very cute, and the video is to be used to reinforce what the parent teaches. The video is Mrs. Caughman actually teaching the stories. It is very engaging.

The testimonies on the Web page are mainly from parents who have had their kids taught using this system. They are quite excited to be offering it outside their school now (and a little nervous). Please take a look at it on their site www.talking-letters.com and if you would like to talk to her about it, please call or write. Their number is 866-352-4971.

Thank you,
Jay Caughman

Letters To The Editor

Better Than Virtual Classrooms

Dear AAE,

The following is a success story about what is working in our school.

Although Parks As Classrooms programs exist throughout the United States, a very unique relationship has developed between our school (Pi Beta Phi Elementary School) and the Great Smokey Mountains National Park in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Our particular program focuses on "teaching" the teacher how to use this incredible resource instead of just participating in ranger-led field trips. This intimate relationship gives our students numerous real-life experiences with cultural and natural resources as well as provides our teachers with a 500,000-acre classroom.

With information and guidance from the GSMNP Education Division, our teachers have led our students to monitor air and water quality, conduct biological inventories, learn about the management of invasive plants and animals, and assisted with the observation of historic structures, just to name a few. Because our teachers and our principal have not been afraid to "leave the building," our students are learning how to be real community and world leaders.

—Mike Miller
8th Grade Science Teacher
Townsend, TN

Fines for Foul Language

Dear AAE,

After reading the "Best Seat in the House" fundraising idea in a previous *Education Matters*, I thought I'd share one I use on a small scale. By the way, I have my principal's OK for this.

At the beginning of the school year, I tell my students what is acceptable speech in my class and what is not. Any time I catch a student using trash talk, profanity, or any other unacceptable language, I charge them 25 cents per word. The money goes into a special container, and in the spring it is donated to the Dollars for Scholars fund. Even students who are not in my class have been "tagged" if they come into my classroom, and my students know the rule applies to them at all times, even in the halls outside of class time. Sometimes all it takes is a reminder that they are "funding a senior scholarship all by themselves," and the language improves.

—Sandy Ritsema
Ackley, Iowa

Decodable Reading—the Missing Link

Dear AAE,

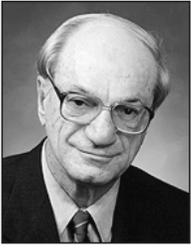
Decodable reading practice is the single ingredient that is most lacking in reading programs today—including Open Court, which many people don't realize has been changed since being bought out by a large publisher. Open Court is the best we've got, but it is still only fifty percent decodable. And all this is so easily remedied by just supplying that one "missing link!"

—Dolores Hiskes
Livermore, CA

Editor's note—Dolores Hiskes is the author and publisher of Phonics Pathways and other educational products. For more information, call 925-449-6983, and for a free newsletter, visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Dorbooks>.

Looking at School Choice in a New Light

By Dr. Myron Lieberman



Dr. Myron Lieberman

The public school establishment contends that vouchers would help only a few students, and that we must focus on measures that would help all students. My belief is that a competitive education industry is the best way to help all students. I also believe that the school choice movement is adopting some dubious strategies, if the goal is a universal voucher that can be used at any school, public or private. At the risk of raising criticism from supporters of school choice, let me explain why I think so.

First, I believe that for a long time to come, most children will be educated in public schools. This may not be true in all states, but enacting voucher legislation; raising the capital; planning and constructing new schools; employing teachers, support staff, and administrators; persuading parents and students to enroll; and doing all the other things necessary to educate tens of millions of students will be a huge task.

These developments will require more than a few years. An enormous amount of venture capital is available today, but it is not going to be invested in launching tens of thousands of new schools in a few years. This is only one reason why the rhetoric about “failing” public schools plays into the hands of the die-hard supporters of the extant public education system, who frighten anyone they can by conjuring up the demise of public schools if voucher plans are enacted.

The constant drumbeat about “failing public schools” is counterproductive, at least with some audiences. First, the phrase antagonizes large numbers of public school employees. It also antagonizes many citizens who have fond memories of their public schools and do not like to see them referred to as “failures.” My high school senior class graduated about 800 seniors. Their reunions evoke fond memories—never once have I heard anyone in my class refer to the school (St. Paul Central) as a failure. Finally, the reference to failing public schools often seems to be unfair because it ignores the social forces that have a negative impact on student conduct and educational achievement.

Nonetheless, my basic concern about the phrase is that it misstates, or at least obscures, the basic argument for a competitive educa-

tion industry. This argument doesn't depend on whether public schools are “failing,” and it is not in the least affected by their “success,” if that is how you wish to characterize their performance. I was a youngster in the heyday of the Model T. The Model T was not a failure; on the contrary, it was a huge success. No one would argue that carmakers should continue to make Model T's because they were successful for a long period of time. The reason they aren't made any more is that they were part of a system in which improvement was mandatory to avoid going out of business.

You might dismiss this point as hairsplitting over tactical matters, but I believe the issues are much more serious. Today, the supporters of school choice appear determined to find benefits (real, alleged, or nonexistent) in every project labeled “school choice”; meanwhile, the public school lobby is busily trying to publicize the deficiencies (real, alleged, or nonexistent) in the same school choice projects. The idea that the truth will emerge from this process is absurd. One side or the other will prevail politically, but the outcomes of existing school choice projects are irrelevant to the substantive argument for a competitive education industry.

Bear in mind that there are many versions of school choice, with different rationales and consequences. For example, the argument that school choice is necessary to protect religious freedom justifies vouchers for freedom of religion but not for free market reasons.

One of the astonishing facts about the contemporary school choice movement is its failure to understand the argument for a competitive education industry. Milton Friedman, the leading proponent of school choice, argued, as early as 1956, that free markets provide better services at a lower cost than government provision of the services. He also suggested that our political system cannot absorb the growing conflict over public education; far from being a unifying force, public schools are one of the most divisive social institutions that we have. Unfortunately, very few school choice proponents can articulate the conditions that are essential for market competition. I leave these conditions to a later column; in the meantime, I hope that the supporters of school choice reconsider their strategy and tactics. The measures required to achieve a competitive education industry require support from various groups who oppose it; for example, some of these groups are sympathetic to reducing the power of the teacher unions, albeit not for the purpose of promoting a competitive education industry.

It is essential to gain the support of these groups, not for “school choice” per se, but for the intermediate measures that are necessary to achieve it. We are not likely to elicit their support by labeling public schools as “failures.” Indeed, school choice strategy has blundered repeatedly by its failure to offer tangible incentives to public school teachers to support school choice legislation. **EM**

Dr. Myron Lieberman is chairman of Education Policy Institute, Senior Research Scholar, Social Philosophy and Policy Center, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio. He is the author or co-author of fifteen books and scores of articles on educational policy and teacher bargaining; his most recent were Handbook on School Board/Union Relations, Teachers Evaluating Teachers: Peer Review and the New Unionism (Transaction Publishers, 1998), and The Teacher Unions (The Free Press, 1997). The Education Policy Institute's web-site can be found at www.educationpolicy.org.



The constant drumbeat about

“failing public schools” is counterproductive.

10 Things Character Education Programs Should Not Do

- 1) Do NOT keep parents in the dark—they are your number one allies.
- 2) Do NOT keep the District Office, the Superintendent, or the Board of Education in the dark.
- 3) The program should NOT “belong” to a few enthusiasts or zealots.
- 4) Do NOT rely on posters, or slogans, quick and glitzy character education gimmicks alone.
- 5) Do NOT count on extrinsic rewards to cultivate virtues.
- 6) Avoid the “Do as I say, not as I do” mentality.
- 7) Do NOT reduce character education to acquiring “the right views.”
- 8) Do NOT be deceived into believing a “character education course” will relieve you of your responsibilities of educating for character whether you teach math, English, science, art, or French.
- 9) Do NOT neglect the million and one opportunities to celebrate, model, communicate, and teach virtue in the hallways, the cafeteria, the playing field, and the faculty room.
- 10) Character education is NOT something that we DO to students.

Source—Center for Advancement of Ethics and Character, Boston University School of Education, 617-353-3262.



Newsflash—Religious Kids Behave Better

You may not be surprised to hear that religious teenagers get into less trouble than their nonreligious peers. But religion as a factor in adolescents' lives hasn't been studied much before, says Christian Smith, PhD, professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

His study analyzes data from a survey of more than 2,400 high school seniors who identified themselves as Baptist, Protestant (other than Baptist), Catholic, Jewish, Mormon, other, or not religious. The students were categorized by how often they attend religious services, how important religion is to them, and how long they'd participated in a church youth group.

"One of the most interesting observations is that the religious correlation doesn't seem to kick in until it reaches the level of the most religious kids," Smith says.

The findings show that the most religious 12th graders are:

- Less likely to skip school
- Less likely to be suspended or expelled
- More likely to have strict parents
- Less likely to smoke, or more likely to start smoking later than other kids
- More likely to never have been drunk and more likely to wait longer than others to get drunk for the first time
- Less likely to use, sell, or be offered drugs (although 39 percent of even the most frequent attenders of religious services reported using some kind of drug)
- Less likely to participate in crimes, including shoplifting

The results also show that religious kids volunteer more and participate more in sports and student government. The study is part of the four-year National Study of Youth and Religion, looking at how religion and spirituality shape and influence teenagers. **EM**

Source—Lisa Habib, WebMD Inc.

Bush Administration Promotes Single-Sex Schools

The U.S. Department of Education is preparing to make more money available and relaxing federal rules to allow for more single-sex public schools.

Following the lead of the Young Women's Leadership Public Charter School of Chicago, eleven new single-sex schools have sprung up in the past two years. Each of the schools has a reported waiting list of applicants.

Academic results are mixed at the various schools, but the parents, students, and teachers are big fans. The initial research indicates the schools are more orderly and that students (especially at the all-girls schools) are showing significant performance gains in math and science.

However, the idea of single-sex schools is drawing criticism from predictable sources. Eleanor Smeal, president of the Feminist Majority Foundation, joins a list of other opponents that includes Nancy Zirkin, deputy director of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. The ACLU, National PTA, and the National Education Association have also joined in opposition. **EM**

Bar None: Pro-Life Law Students Fight for Access

Law students at Washington University in St. Louis are learning the hard way that when it comes to defending academic freedom, conservatives need not apply. A group on campus called Law Students Pro-Life has asked the Student Bar Association (SBA) for official recognition twice and been denied. Now the group is seeking to appeal the decision, and it may receive help from an unlikely source—the ACLU. Even liberals at the American Civil Liberties Union publicly acknowledged that the SBA ought to recognize the right of its fellow students to organize whether it agrees with their beliefs. The stakes are high. Should the SBA rebuff the pro-lifers again, they will be barred from meeting on campus property or applying for university funds. **EM**

Source—Washington Update, Family Research Council, Washington, D.C.

Direct Instruction Proves Its Worth

The Pacific Research Institute's Center for Education Reform released a report indicating that many high-poverty high-achieving schools use direct instruction teaching methods, which are largely based on scripted lesson plans. Criticism has been leveled at these methods for being too stifling for teachers. And the idea of a heavily regimented curriculum will not always square with the aspirations that bright professionals need. Yet direct instruction bears good fruit if properly used. It takes additional hours of training and requires a commitment to students' needs. Ronni Ephraim, assistant superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, relates that direct instruction, while strongly resisted initially, is apparently well accepted after teachers see its benefit to students. Says Ephraim, "In our early years, we would receive many, many, many letters of concern from teachers. But commitment follows confidence, and now that they feel more confident using the program, and they are seeing how well students are doing, we're not getting those kinds of letters anymore." **EM**

Source—Teacher Quality Bulletin, a publication of National Council on Teacher Quality, www.nctq.org. The report, *They Have Overcome: High-Poverty, High-Performing Schools in California*, by Pacific Research Institute may be found at www.pacificresearch.org/pub/sab/educat/they_have_overcome.pdf.

A School That Helps Learning Disabled Kids

While most special education experts believe that including learning disabled children in regular classrooms is ideal, try telling that to parents whose kids attend the Lab School in Washington, D.C.

Each year, 400 applicants vie for forty spots at this privately operated school, where all 310 students suffer from moderate to severe learning disabilities. Using many imaginative, hands-on activities, the innovative school teaches coping strategies that allow most kids to return to regular schools after three to four years, and 90 percent of its students eventually go to college. A typical teacher in the school may have three assistants for a class of eleven kids, and tuition is \$18,000 a year. But for 80 percent of the school's students, tuition is covered by a combination of district, state, and federal money—thanks to IDEA.

Last year, the District of Columbia school system paid the Lab School \$4.3 million for Washington youngsters enrolled there. If D.C. ever succeeds in fixing its severely troubled special education program, many of these students would be obliged to return to regular public schools and receive their special education services there.

For now, though, the lucky few enjoy a world-class education, while many more of the District's disabled kids simply do without. A ten-page portrait of the Lab School, considered one of the best in the land for learning-disabled kids, and its colorful and demanding principal Sally Smith, appears in "Stepping Out of the Mainstream," by Stacy Weiner, *Teacher Magazine*, October 2002. You may review the article at www.teachermagazine.org/tmstory.cfm?slug=02lab.h14. **EM**

Source—*The Education Gadfly, a publication of Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, www.edexcellence.net/gadfly.*

Democrats Redefine Public Education

The Democratic Party and its national candidates are generally opposed to the idea of school choice and the use of publicly funded school vouchers. Notable exceptions at the local level are strong school choice supporters John Norquist, mayor of Milwaukee, and John Gardner, Milwaukee school board member.

In a recent report, Gardner calls for a redefinition of public education to include multiple providers, both public and private. The Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) has issued a similar call for redefining public education.

"We should rid ourselves of the rigid notion that public schools are defined by who owns and operates them," stated the DLC. "In the 21st century, a public school should be any school that is of the people (accountable to public authorities for its results), by the people (paid for by the public), and for the people (open to the public and geared toward public purposes).

"The school system of the future should be a network of accountable schools of all shapes, sizes, and styles with their own decision-making authority—each of which competes against the others for its students." **EM**

Source—*School Reform News, March 2002, a publication of The Heartland Institute, www.heartland.org.*

Dueling Polls on School Choice

In the aftermath of the U.S. Supreme Court's June 2002 decision concerning the constitutionality of the Cleveland Scholarship Program (also known as vouchers), one thing is certain: The public's support for school choice is growing, especially if you ask certain questions.

In 1999, Public Agenda surveyed individuals as to "whether or not you favor or oppose...parents being given a voucher or certificate by the government to pay for all or part of tuition if they decide to send their child to a private or parochial school." Fifty-seven percent generally supported that proposition, while 68 and 65 percent, respectively, of African-Americans and Hispanics did.

Anticipating that the annual PDK/Gallup poll might again use the kind of questioning that could naturally elicit lower support numbers, the Center for Education Reform (CER) surveyed 1,200 adults on the following question: "How much are you in favor of or against allowing poor parents to be given the tax dollars allotted for their child's education and permitting them to use those dollars in the form of a scholarship to attend a private, public, or parochial school of their choosing?"

Using this language figures jumped significantly. Sixty-three percent supported it generally, as did 71 and 63 percent, respectively, of African-American and Hispanics. **EM**

Pay-for-Performance Update

New incentive packages for teachers are popping up around the country.

In Chattanooga, Tennessee, incentive programs are bringing badly needed experienced teachers into high-risk schools. The local teachers union is not thrilled. "If a system says all we're going to do is give a test, and based on that, determine if you deserve or not deserve pay, I think that is very degrading for me as a professional," says NEA representative Dennis Van Roekel.

Cincinnati had hammered out a merit plan with union cooperation, and briefly seemed to serve as an example for the rest of the nation. But union politics helped derail the effort.

In Kentucky, however, merit pay and differentials for teaching hard-to-staff subjects were implemented, and in Minnesota, four districts, including Minneapolis, now have

pay-for-performance plans, thanks in no small part to the efforts of State Education Commissioner Christine Jax. **EM**

Source—*Teacher Quality Bulletin, a biweekly e-mail newsletter brought to you by the National Council on Teacher Quality, (www.ntcq.org).*

Uncredentialed Teacher of the Year

The friction between teacher certification and teacher qualification continues to produce heat in education policy. The latest incident comes from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where automotive teacher Patrick Venezia lost his job for failing to enroll in a master's degree program, as required by district teacher contract. Venezia was making \$30,000. His replacement, who holds a master's degree in special education, will make \$50,000.

"As far as I know, there's no master's program for auto technology," Venezia told the *Manchester Union Leader*. "So why should I spend the taxpayers' money getting a degree in something I'm not even going to teach?"

Good question. Portsmouth Superintendent of Schools Lyonel Tracy went to the Association of Portsmouth Teachers to see if the contract stipulation could be modified. "They took no interest," he said. The school board voted 7-1 to fire Venezia.

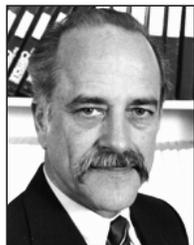
Not all school districts are so inflexible and shortsighted. Back in 1995, the principal at John Kelley School in Thermal, California, hired as a full-time teacher someone who was merely inquiring about a substitute teaching job. The candidate had a doctorate and was fluent in Spanish, but lacked a California teaching credential. He applied for and received an emergency credential, and for the next two years taught math and science full-time while working on his credential after school. In 1997, now teaching social studies, language arts and PE, he was selected as Teacher of the Year by the Coachella Valley Unified School District. He didn't receive his credential until 1998.

This teacher went on to be honored at the White House, the NEA Representative Assembly, and dozens of other venues as the 2002 National Teacher of the Year: Chauncey Veatch. **EM**

Source—*Communiqué, a publication of The Education Intelligence Agency, which conducts public education research, analysis, and investigations. The Agency may be contacted at 916-422-4373, or EducationIntel@aol.com.*

Study Finds Unionism Means Higher Taxes, Not Necessarily Higher Earnings

By David Denholm



David Denholm

A new study finds that where labor unions are stronger, taxes are higher, but real earnings are not necessarily higher.

The study by the Public Service Research Foundation examined state-by-state data on

earnings from the Bureau of Labor Statistics adjusted for the cost of living and average state and local taxes.

It concludes that in 2000, average weekly earnings in the twenty-four states with above-average levels of unionism were \$548 compared to an average of \$551 for states with below-average levels of unionism.

“This study does not show that where there is less unionism earnings are higher. What it shows is that there is little, if any, correlation between high levels of unionism and higher earnings,” said David Denholm, the president of the Public Service Research Foundation.

The study found some extreme examples of differences between adjusted earnings and levels of unionism. Virginia had the highest level of adjusted earnings but ranked 47th in the level of unionism, while Hawaii had the lowest level of adjusted earnings and ranked second in the level of unionism.

New York, the state with the highest level of unionism, ranked ninth in unadjusted earnings but 33rd in adjusted earnings. North Carolina, the state with the lowest level of unionism, ranked 29th in unadjusted earnings but 13th in adjusted earnings.

“The real surprise in this study was the extent to which union strength correlated to higher taxes,” said Denholm. “The average level of unionism in states with above-average levels of state and local taxes is 14.6 percent, while it is only 10.2 percent in the low tax states. But, when you look at ten states with the highest level of taxes, the level of unionism is 16.2 percent compared to 10.2 percent in the low tax states,” Denholm said.

To confirm the influence of unionism on taxes, the study also examined the grades for votes on taxing and spending legislation given to each state’s U.S. Senate delegation by the National Taxpayers Union. In the states with high levels of unionism, the average grade was a D, while in the states with low unionism it was a C+. In the ten states with the best NTU grades, the average level of unionism was only 6.8 percent, while in the ten states with the lowest NTU grades the average level of unionism was 19.4 percent.

“Clearly, unionism is more of a political than an economic influence. There is very little reason to believe that unions raise wages and every reason to believe that union political influence results in higher taxes,” Denholm concluded.

The study was done using a state-by-state cost of living index from the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, and average levels of state and local taxes from the Tax Foundation.

The study also notes that, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, American manufacturing workers who are not represented by a union enjoy higher earnings than their union counterparts. It also notes that significantly higher levels of unionism and higher average earnings in public employment tend to put upward pressure on the union wage differential. When the public sector is excluded from the calculations, the differential is only 13.7 percent. **EM**

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
“Clearly, unionism
is more of a
political than an
economic influence.”

David Denholm is president of the Public Service Research Foundation. The Foundation is a nonprofit organization that studies public sector unionism and union influence on public policy. The study “Does Unionism Mean Higher Earnings or Higher Taxes?” may be reviewed in its entirety at <http://www.psrif.org/issues/taxes.jsp>.

Scores Too Good! Chicago Board of Education Demands Audit of Inner-City School

Retest confirms outstanding results

At Paul Revere Elementary School, a pre-K–8 school on Chicago’s southeast side, the spring 2002 Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in eighth-grade reading and math showed such dramatic increases over the previous year that the Chicago Board of Education requested an audit.

The audit, which required a one-hour retest of the eighth-graders in reading and math, confirmed that the original test scores were accurate. In Cynthia Pates’ eighth-grade class, students scoring at or above national norms increased by 47.1 percentage points in reading and 76.7 percentage points in math. “This is the first year in my five years at Paul Revere

that students actually asked for more work,” says Pates.

“Reading and Math Renaissance clearly made an impact on our test scores and our entire school culture,” says Principal Shelby Taylor. “The targeted instruction plus time on appropriate practice was key.”

Paul Revere Elementary implemented Reading Renaissance fully and piloted Math Renaissance during the 2001–2002 academic year, thanks to funding from the Comer Foundation.

The Renaissance programs helped create a culture of success at Paul Revere. “We really began to focus on academics,” says Taylor. The school’s Reading

Renaissance program became a community effort, he adds. Parents were trained as reading tutors, using the Duolog Reading method to tutor children both in school and at home. Regular Family Reading Nights featured Celebrity Readers—among them, Illinois Congressman Bobbie Rush.

The entire community celebrated the school’s success in late June, with a party attended by almost 2,000. **EM**

Source—School Improvement News, a publication of Renaissance Learning, Inc. Reproduced with permission of the publisher. For more information, contact Sheila Wenz, 1-800-200-4848.

Why Many Social Studies Teachers Don't Teach History and What to Do about It

Several months ago, the Department of Education released the most recent batch of scores on the NAEP history exam, and the results for 12th graders were abysmal. Once you learn a little about the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS), the 26,000-member organization of teachers of history, geography, political science, economics, sociology, and psychology, you may not be surprised that history scores are so bad.

In the May 6th issue of *The Weekly Standard*, Kay Hymowitz of the Manhattan Institute took a look at what the NCSS had to say about citizenship over the past decade. Last year, after the tragic September 11th attacks, the NCSS magazine warned that the attacks would provide the excuse Americans wanted to indulge their reflexive racism and revenge-oriented ideology.

But the deep cynicism of the NCSS about America is nothing new. For the most part, the NCSS aims to “de-exceptionalize” both America and the Western world as a whole

(“we’re just another country and another group of people”) and to help students think of themselves not as Americans but as members of the global community. The curriculum standards that the NCSS promulgated for social studies in 1994 include a list of performance expectations that cover culture, economics, technology, “continuity and change,” and personal identity, but no American history, no major documents, and only a smattering of references to government at all, writes Hymowitz.

Many states have embraced the NCSS idea that you don’t need to know any American history to be an effective citizen, and use the NCSS curricular guidelines as the model for their state social studies standards. NCSS theoreticians reject the notion of America’s Founders that self-governing citizens must learn their country’s Constitution and political history well, for only those who understand their country would love it, and only those who love it would be willing to undertake the work

and sacrifice to sustain it, Hymowitz writes (“Anti-Social Studies,” by Kay Hymowitz, *The Weekly Standard*, May 6, 2002).

According to an article in the *Washington Post*, advisers to President Bush are developing a package of policies to boost civics education in the United States in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks. The ideas they’re considering include federal incentives to states to adopt civics education classes in public schools, expansion of “service learning” classes that give credit for community volunteer work, drafting of a civics curriculum, and the use of the presidential bully pulpit. From the 1920s to the 1960s, at least half of American high school students took civics classes, but by 1994, that number had fallen to 10 percent, as civics education was replaced by government classes that do not deal with citizen involvement.

Anyone looking for resources that can be used to teach history and geography in grades K-6 should take a look at a fine new series of books developed by the Core Knowledge Foundation to supplement or supplant ordinary textbooks. At the first-grade level, teachers (or parents) can choose from slim, colorful books on Mesopotamia, Ancient Egypt, Three World Religions, Mexico Today, Early Civilizations of the Americas, Early Explorers and Settlers, From Colonies to Independence, and Exploring the West; at the fourth-grade level, the offerings, which are equally engaging but even more packed with content, include Using Maps, World Mountains, Europe in the Middle Ages, The Spread of Islam, African Kingdoms, Dynasties of China, The American Revolution, The United States Constitution, Early Presidents: Washington through Jackson, and American Reformers. There are other selections for all grades from K-6. For more information, contact E.D. Hirsch at edh9k@aol.com. **EM**

Source—The Education Gadfly, news and analysis from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, www.edexcellence.net.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Many states have embraced the NCSS idea that you don’t need to know any American history to be an effective citizen.

the way—and those who were not committed to seeing the mission through were asked to leave.

Not everyone will welcome this approach, with its emphasis on centralization, uniformity, and command-and-control. It’s not the only approach to education reform that America should be trying. But it’s exceedingly hopeful, nonetheless. The case studies reported in “Foundations for Success” suggest that effective reform can be initiated, managed, and driven from the top in an urban school system as long as the conditions are right, the full set of reform strategies is pursued simultaneously, and leaders stay the course. This is a significant message of hope for those struggling across the land to improve urban education. It also suggests that the systemic cures assumed by No Child Left Behind are not pipe dreams. **EM**

Terry Ryan is program director at the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation can be found at www.fordhamfoundation.org on the Web.

Source—“Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement,” Council of the Great City Schools, September 2002, www.cgcs.org/reports/Foundations.html.

New Hope for Urban Schools

Continued from page 1

It’s not a complete formula for urban school reform, to be sure. Casserly notes, for example, that even these relatively successful districts have so far accomplished little by way of reforming their high schools. And he’s well aware of all the things that can go wrong, beginning with the turmoil produced by revolving doors in the superintendent’s office and abrupt shifts on the school board. Doing all these things well demands time, sustained focus, and stable leadership.

It’s also about hard work. In the higher-performing systems, administrators and teachers reported that their jobs became much more demanding and stressful than in the past. They worried that the strain would take the joy out of being educators and working with children. District leaders dealt with this anxiety by improving facilities and materials, while providing professional development that emphasized the importance of the mission of educating young people. Teachers, principals, and school administrators were also given the opportunity to celebrate successes along

Quote of the month

“What have we got, an educational Taliban here? Are they gonna require burqas soon?”—California Teachers Association President Wayne Johnson, reacting to a Southern California middle school’s dress code for teachers: slacks and ties or polo shirts for men, and no bare legs, pierced tongues, jeans or sneakers.

(Associated Press, May 12)

B O O K
R E V I E W

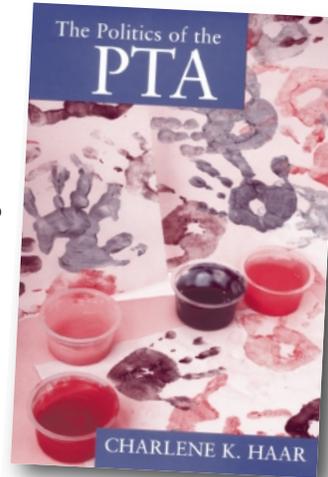
The Politics of the PTA

By Charlene K. Haar

The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) is one of our nation's largest and most respected organizations, and is often viewed as a key player in education policy. Mainstream coverage of the PTA treats the organization as a beneficent group of parents dedicated solely to bettering our nation's school. In this groundbreaking new book, Charlene K. Haar critically assesses the PTA and shows that the common perceptions of the organization are deeply misguided. Surveying the organization's history, Haar demonstrates its longstanding tendency to involve itself in issues of little relevance to education. In more recent years, Haar contends, when the PTA

has addressed important educational issues, its positions have merely echoed the views of the powerful teacher unions: the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association. Because it reflects the views of these interest groups, the modern PTA rarely speaks with a truly independent voice, thus depriving *parents* of a potentially constructive force for reform in public education.

Haar makes a case that the PTA's domination by the teacher unions has eroded its commitment to promoting the educational achievement and well-being of children. In remaining neutral on teacher strikes, for example, the PTA has abandoned the interests of students and their parents. Abandoned also is the PTA's role as an inde-



pendent analyst of education policy. Instead, the PTA has directed the energies of local and state PTA activists into lobbying for more federal programs—programs that often undermine parental authority. Rank-and-file members of the PTA inadvertently support the national organization's activist social agenda by paying membership dues and engaging in extensive fundraising activities. Unable to stand up to the teacher unions or to represent parent interests, the PTA seems destined for irrelevance, as its base in the schools is being increasingly challenged by local parent organizations that choose not to be affiliated with the National PTA. **EM**

For more information contact Social Philosophy and Policy Center, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403-0188, or call 1-419-372-2536.

What Are We Fighting For? American Students Don't Know

A Report to the American Council of Trustees and Alumni by William Bennett

Based on a telephone survey of 634 college students nationwide, Americans for Victory over Terrorism, chaired by ACTA National Council member William J. Bennett, reported this month that college students are remarkably ignorant about world figures and profoundly ambivalent about what America is fighting for.

College students lack knowledge of U.S. history and government and—like many of their professors—reject any notion that the U.S. represents values and ideals superior to other forms of government.

Here are some of the results:

Students were more likely to identify Yasser Arafat correctly than any other major player (including our own Cabinet) in the war on terrorism.

American students intensely and overwhelmingly disagree with the statement that Western culture is superior to Arab culture. Only 16 percent believe Western culture is superior to Arab culture, and 79 percent do not.

When asked whether they believed the values of the United States are superior to the values of other nations, a full 71 percent disagreed, with 34 percent strongly disagreeing.

While President Bush receives very high marks for his handling of the presidency (70 percent), a majority of college students believe the policies of the United States are at least somewhat responsible for the September 11 terrorist attacks.

While 79 percent believe the U.S. has the right to overthrow Saddam Hussein, 58 percent report they would evade the draft if called on to fight.

The full survey can be accessed at www.avot.org.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

58 percent report they would evade the draft if called on to fight.

“In short, students who have not been taught the principles on which this nation is founded are unwilling to fight to defend it,” says Bennett. **EM**

Source—*Inside Academe* is published quarterly by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, Washington, D.C. Web-site: www.goacta.org. Reprinted with permission.



Gary Beckner
Managing Editor
Pieterke Beckner
Associate Editor
Diane Meyer
Editorial Assistant
Kelley Autry
Research
Ron Law
Newsletter Design & Layout

★★ Advisory Board ★★

Leta Rains Andrews • Tracey Bailey
Patricia Ann Baltz • Gene Bedley
Polly Broussard • Eric Buehrer
Dr. Kevin Ryan • Guy Rice Doud
Thomas A. Fleming • Valerie Anderson Hill
Dr. Lewis Hodge • Dr. William Kilpatrick

EducationMatters is published by the Association of American Educators. For more information, contact AAE, 25201 Paseo de Alicia, Suite 104, Laguna Hills, CA 92653

(949) 595-7979
(800) 704-7799
Fax (949) 595-7970

E-mail: info@aaeteachers.org
Website: aaeteachers.org

©2002 by Association of American Educators